



MASTER BUILDERS
A U S T R A L I A

23 January 2020

Senator the Hon James McGrath
Chair, Legislation Committee
Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator

STUDENT IDENTIFIERS AMENDMENT (ENHANCED STUDENT PERMISSIONS) BILL 2019

Master Builders Australia is writing to you as Chair of the Legislation Committee of the Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment (the Committee) to provide input to the inquiry into Student Identifiers Amendment (Enhanced Student Permissions) Bill 2019 (the Permissions Bill).

Master Builders Australia is the nation's peak building and construction industry association. Federated on a national basis in 1890, Master Builders Australia's members are the Master Builders state and territory associations. Over 129 years the movement has grown to over 33,000 businesses nationwide, including the top 100 construction companies, and is the only industry association representing all three sectors—residential, commercial and engineering—of the construction industry.

We are supportive of the Permissions Bill and moves that will strengthen the integrity of recruitment processes for vocational education and training (VET) graduates. We note there are some improvements the Committee may wish to consider to align the Permissions Bill with the extension of the unique student identifier (USI) to university students.

The building and construction industry has a skilled workforce and is heavily reliant on vocational training. When hiring employees or sub-contractors some businesses take information from candidates about their credentials at face value because it is too time consuming and difficult to check authenticity, particularly for candidates with multiple credentials from different training providers. Master Builders Australia encourages businesses to do their due diligence and check the authenticity of credentials when making hiring decisions.

Once the Permissions Bill is enacted and implemented it will be significantly easier for businesses to quickly and easily check the authenticity of employee, potential employee and sub-contractor credentials. Master Builders Australia believes this will lead to more businesses checking credentials, which will improve trust in the VET system and VET transcripts as well as workforce quality and outcomes.

Privacy

We note the Permissions Bill was referred immediately to the Committee on the perception of potential risks to privacy and people's ability to make a 'fresh start'. However, we also note that the Government engaged HWL Ebsworth to prepare a Privacy Impact Assessment to ensure consistency with the *Privacy Act 1988* and that all recommendations were agreed and are being implemented. We are of the opinion that the steps already taken satisfactorily address the privacy concerns.

Further to this, the Hon Steve Irons MP, Assistant Minister for Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships, addressed privacy matters in the second reading of the Permissions Bill in the House of Representatives on 28 November 2019, stating:

"the individual's privacy will remain protected. In particular, individuals will retain the authority to set the access controls for their stored authenticated VET transcript. This includes setting the period that an authenticated transcript can be viewed as well as the removal of access to their stored authenticated VET transcript at any time.

A privacy impact assessment was conducted for this initiative. All recommendations have been agreed to and are being implemented."

Additionally, this proposal is not without precedent. A similar system, My eEquals (myequals.edu.au), is already in place for the higher education sector in Australia and New Zealand. Through My eEquals, higher education graduates can provide employers and others with digital access to their authenticated transcripts.

Extension of the USI to higher education students

The Permissions Bill is not the only bill before the Parliament that proposes to amend to the *Student Identifiers Act 2014* (the Act). The Student Identifiers Amendment (Higher Education) Bill 2019 (the Higher Education Bill) also proposes amendments; namely to extend the USI to cover higher education students.

On 5 December 2019 the Senate referred the Permissions Bill to the committee for inquiry but did not refer the Higher Education Bill. In our view this was a missed opportunity to ensure consistency and we urge the Committee to consider proposed amendments in the Higher Education Bill as part of this inquiry. For example, if both bills are passed as currently drafted there will be legislated civil penalties under the Act for altering or falsifying an authenticated VET transcript or extract, but not a higher education transcript or extract.

Further, with working lives becoming longer and jobs changing over time, it is increasingly likely that people will participate in both the VET and higher education sectors over the course of their careers. The extension of student identifiers to higher education students presents the opportunity to create a single digital database and platform of authenticated transcripts and qualifications for all post-secondary – vocational and university – education.

A single integrated platform will maximise the benefits of the USI and My eQuals platforms for all stakeholders. Individuals will have a single authenticated lifelong record of their post-secondary educational attainment and be able to provide access to entities as required. For example, to potential employers when applying for a new job; to training and education providers to demonstrate prior learning; or to licencing bodies for occupational licencing requirements.

Implementation of this opportunity would require the USI and My eQuals platforms to be integrated or information to be shared and an update to Part 3 of the Act, beyond what is proposed in the Permissions Bill, to either remove references to VET or add references to higher education. We encourage the Committee to consider this opportunity as part of the inquiry process.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to this inquiry. As noted above, Master Builders Australia is supportive of the Permissions Bill, acknowledges the steps already taken to address privacy concerns and encourages the Committee to align the Permissions Bill and the Higher Education Bill. If you require further information in relation to the submission please contact Jennifer Lawrence on 02 6202 8814 or Jennifer.Lawrence@masterbuilders.com.au.

Yours sincerely



Denita Wawn

Chief Executive Office